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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 07 TEL AVIV 001114

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

- [1](#). Mideast
- [2](#). Iraq

Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio quoted President Bush as saying on Monday: "I see a threat in Iran. The threat is, of course, their stated objective to destroy our strong ally Israel. I've made it clear and I'll make it clear again, that we will use military might to protect our ally Israel." Israel Radio reported that on Monday in New York, the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany were unable to reach concurrence on the issue of the Iranian nuclear program. The radio quoted Under Secretary for Political Affairs Nicholas Burns as saying that some progress was made at the talks. Israel Radio quoted a Western diplomat as saying that the meeting was harsh, mainly because of Russian and Chinese opposition to the tough stance of the US, the UK, and France vis-a-vis Tehran. Gary Berntsen, the former CIA operative who led the search for Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan in late 2001, was quoted as saying in an interview with The Jerusalem Post that the US has the ability to destroy Iran's nuclear facilities in two days.

Major media reported that the Karni cargo crossing between Israel and the Gaza Strip briefly reopened on Monday, but that it was shut down 30-40 minutes later due to new warnings of planned attacks on the terminal. Israel Radio reported that the crossing will reopen today in a limited fashion. Leading media quoted Palestinian sources as saying that food in the Gaza Strip is becoming more scarce.

Maariv reported that the IDF is not allowing PA ministers-designate to move freely between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and to meet one another.

The Jerusalem Post quoted FM and Justice Minister Tzipi Livni as saying during a meeting with US and Canadian delegates of a homeland security conference in Jerusalem that Israel should follow the US model and widen its definition of homeland security to include civil emergencies as well as terror attacks. Ha'aretz and Yediot led with election-related issues. Israel Beiteinu Chairman Avigdor Lieberman was quoting as saying in an interview with Ha'aretz that Acting PM Ehud Olmert's plan for a further unilateral withdrawal in the West Bank has already caused Israel damage vis-a-vis Hamas, the international community, and Israeli Arab extremists. Lieberman told the newspaper: "The more Kadima talks, with excessive confidence, about Olmert's diplomatic program, the less likely it becomes that we will be in the next government headed by Olmert." Yediot quoted senior Labor Party members as saying that Labor will renounce cabinet portfolios in a coalition with Kadima, but that Labor demands that social reforms -- a USD-1,000 minimum wage, a compulsory pension plan, and a raise in allowances for the elderly -- be included in the new government's

guidelines. Yediot quoted the Labor officials as saying that their party is not ruling out staying in the opposition. Leading media reported that Meretz won in mock elections at Tel Aviv University. The Jerusalem Post reported on similar results in mock elections at Queens College, New York. The Jerusalem Post reported that on March 28, the group Israel Votes will announce the results of an online "vote" involving 50,000 US college students.

Yediot and other media reported that the interim report of the parliamentary commission of inquiry into the evacuation of the Amona outpost, which will be made public today, is expected to express sharp criticism of Internal Security Minister Gideon Ezra, principally over his refusal to let police officers appear before the commission. Yediot wrote that the commission will also blame Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz, and the police for its violent behavior. However, the newspaper reported that the commission will not find fault with the GOI's decision-makers.

Ha'aretz and The Jerusalem Post reported on the Second World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace, which is being held in Seville, Spain on March 19-22, and sponsored by the Paris-based peace foundation Hommes de Parole.

Major media reported that on Monday, National Jewish Front leader Baruch Marzel, who is campaigning for the upcoming elections, called on the IDF to assassinate Uri Avnery, the far-left leader of the Gush Shalom movement.

US Senator Russell Feingold (D-WI) was quoted as saying in an interview with The Jerusalem Post that were he to become a candidate for the Presidency, one issue would not stand in his way: his Jewish identity.

The Jerusalem Post reported that Gil Fogiel, a former IAF pilot is participating in the Breaking the Ice mission of peace. Ten participants from around the world have embarked on a journey that has taken them through Israel, the Palestinian territories, Jordan, and Egypt.

Ha'aretz printed a Reuters report that on Monday, the US Supreme Court rejected an appeal by convicted spy Jonathan Pollard. The justices declined to review a US appeals court ruling that federal courts lack jurisdiction to review claims for access to such documents for clemency petitions. Major media reported on the project.

All media highlighted the continuing bird-flu crisis.

Mideast:

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "[An agreement on the Karni crossing] could ... serve as a first model of non-political understanding between Israel and the Hamas government."

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "The 'humanitarian crisis' has already occurred; withholding assistance is the key to helping the Palestinians work their way out of it."

Defense and foreign affairs columnist Amir Oren wrote in Ha'aretz: "Hamas is like a drunk driver ... speeding along [a] highway in the wrong lane." Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv: "If the polls are right, Israel of early 2006 will be different ... with a new, powerful, and biting [political] Center that will shake up the entire country and move it forward -- [but] not sure in which direction."

Block Quotes:

II. "An Agreement Is Essential"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (March 21): "Israel, which is facing elections and has clarified that it does not intend to assist a Hamas-led Palestinian Authority financially, is also holding on to the Karni crossing as a way of proving that the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip has put an end to the occupation there. On the other hand, we cannot accept

the Palestinian position that even if Palestinian civilians die of hunger, goods will not be allowed to pass through the Kerem Shalom crossing. The Palestinians have no right to expect support for their inhumane position, which depends on political suspicions -- even if those suspicions have a basis. Israel and the Palestinian Authority, even if the PA is run by Hamas, are therefore obligated to reach an agreement immediately and an understanding on the issue of operating the Karni crossing, rather than transforming it into a political hatchet or battlefield in which the only casualties are innocent civilians. An agreement on the Karni crossing that will not damage the terminal's functioning and will assure the security of those who pass through it is essential for both sides. It could also serve as a first model of non-political understanding between Israel and the Hamas government."

II. "Helping Palestinians"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (March 21): "Abbas is now claiming that he will refuse to approve the cabinet if the international community causes a 'crisis' by cutting off assistance to the PA. The fact that Fatah refused to join the cabinet is a clear indication that Abbas hopes that a Hamas-led government will not be viable. Abbas's 'threat,' then, should be seen as an invitation to the international community to continue unwaveringly in its commitment not to fund a Hamas government that refuses to meet any of the conditions set by the Quartet. Hamas is hoping that it can avoid any compromise while retaining international assistance by threatening the West with the suffering of the Palestinian people. James Wolfensohn, though an envoy for the Quartet, expressed this Palestinian argument succinctly in testimony Wednesday before Congress, 'I do not believe you can have a million starving Palestinians and have peace.'.... As much as the international community wishes to help the Palestinians, the aid that was showered upon them over the last decade not only failed to do so, but nurtured a completely dysfunctional regime deeply tainted by terrorism. The only way to change this, it seems, is to refuse to continue to finance a PA that refuses to adhere to the Quartet's conditions. The 'humanitarian crisis' has already occurred; withholding assistance is the key to helping the Palestinians work their way out of it."

III. "Hamas's Victory of Deterrence"

Defense and foreign affairs columnist Amir Oren wrote in Ha'aretz (March 21): "The debate now in Israel is when to confront Hamas: soon, at the cost of a military campaign, in the hopes of restoring Fatah to power -- but this time, the younger and less corrupt generation; or in another year or more, after a period of comparative quiet, but at the cost of a dangerous build-up in Palestinian strength.... For the next week, until the elections, Israel and the PA still appear to be traveling along the same road. That is true, but misleading, because Hamas is like a drunk driver ... speeding along [a] highway in the wrong lane: The journey is guaranteed to end in a fatal crash, unless Hamas either sobers up, overturns or discovers that it has run out of gas."

IV. "Countdown"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of popular, pluralist Maariv (March 21): "Superficially, these elections are over. The results are known -- more or less. But under the surface, things are still stirring. As this campaign has broken almost all myths, as so many things have turned around, as no one could have foreseen Kadima's success and later its achievement without its leader and founding father ... it is impossible to completely predict today what will really happen here next Tuesday.... With this nation, in this crazy reality, everything is still possible. Still, it would be hard to see a significant change from what the polls are saying. And if the polls are right, Israel of early 2006 will be different -- no longer fifty-fifty Left-Right, with a frustrating tie and a freeze, but with a new, powerful, and biting [political] Center that will shake up the entire country and move it forward -- [but] not sure in which direction."

12. Iraq:

Summary:

Shlomo Avineri, Hebrew University Professor of Political Science and former director-general of the Foreign Ministry, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post: "By calling the strife in Iraq 'sectarian,' observers and policymakers are trying to minimize the deep chasms that divide Iraqi society."

Block Quotes:

"Iraq's Only Way Out?"
Shlomo Avineri, Hebrew University Professor of Political Science and former director-general of the Foreign Ministry, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (March 21): "There seems to be no power able to hold Iraq together.... Iraq is going the way of the former Yugoslavia. When ethnic and religious groups are unable and unwilling to live together in a country held together by force and lacking any democratic traditions, disintegration may be the only way out. Maybe three states in what used to be Iraq have a better chance -- as occurred in Yugoslavia -- of leading to some stabilization and even democratic development. By calling the strife in Iraq 'sectarian,' observers and policymakers are trying to minimize the deep chasms that divide Iraqi society -- like calling the bloody wars between Catholics and Protestants in 17th-century Europe 'sectarian.'"

JONES